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# POEMS OF GUN AND ROD



BY ERNEST MCGAFFEY

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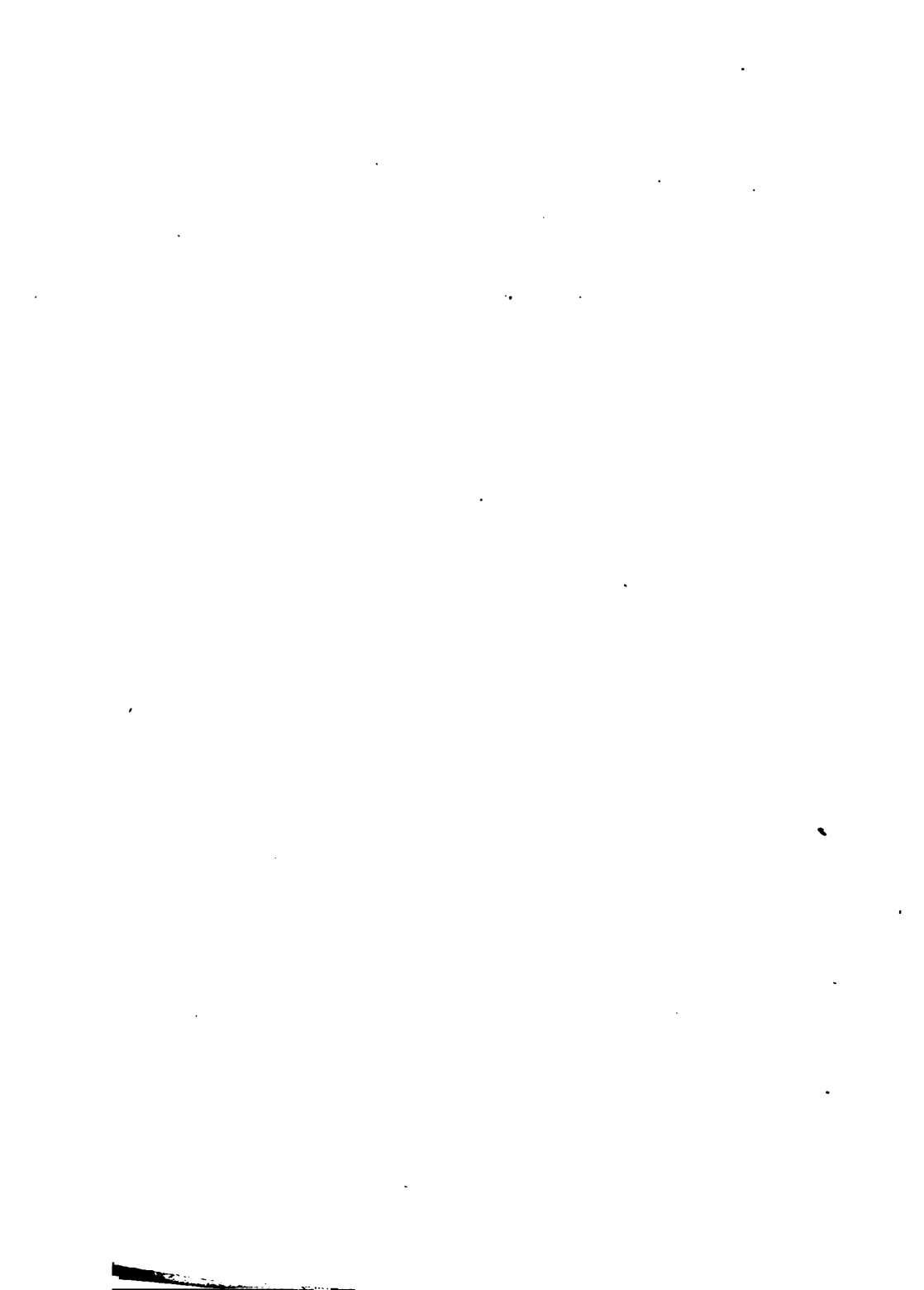
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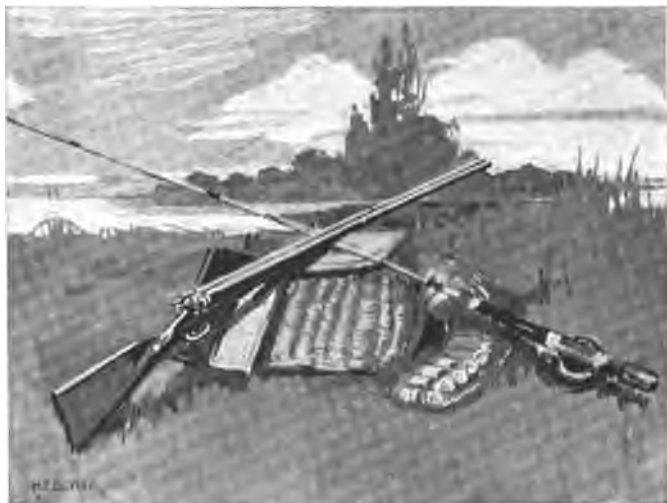
# POEMS OF GUN AND ROD





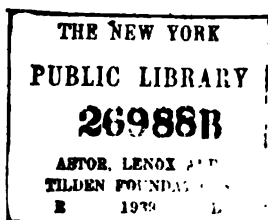
❧ ❧ POEMS OF  
GUN AND ROD

BY ERNEST MCGAFFEY ❧ ❧



ILLUSTRATED BY HERBERT E. BUTLER

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS  
NEW YORK, 1892 ❧ ❧ ❧



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## GREETING

DEAR comrades of my happy out-door days,  
These halting rhymes, that from my heart I send,  
With midnight stars and flakes of dawning blend  
With morning's gray and sunset's steady blaze ;  
And up through marshy flats and wooded ways  
Where tall oaks rise, and rustling rushes bend,  
Passes the form of many an old-time friend  
Who trod with me the field and forest maze  
From dawn to dusk ; I count them as they pass,  
And leaps my blood again as one by one  
The old days rise, while Nature's Circe-strain,  
That lures men on 'mid sun and wind and rain,  
Comes back to me o'er harps of tangled grass  
And sets me dreaming of the rod and gun.



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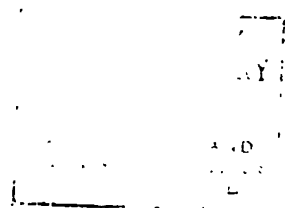




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The Gun

## THE GUN

WITH perfect lines from butt to sight,  
    Damascus barrels, twelve in gauge  
That shine within like mirrors bright,  
    A triumph of this latter age ;  
Gnarled walnut wood the solid stock,  
    And smoother than your finger-nail  
Extension rib, rebounding lock,  
    And balanced like a truthful scale.

No fine engraving tracery shown  
    On locks or barrels for the vain,  
A weapon for its worth alone,  
    A beauty, yet severely plain ;  
Top-snap the action, as you see,  
    And corrugated buck-horn tip,  
As finished as an arm should be  
    From muzzle through to pistol-grip.

A trusty comrade, this old gun,  
    And certain, if you hold it right,

To drop the jack-snipe one by one  
Or stop a partridge in his flight—  
To bring to earth the woodcock where  
In lowland covert out he springs,  
Or send far up in crispy air  
The death-hail, where the wild-goose wings.

Let Folly's votaries fill her train,  
And chirping poets feebly rhyme;  
In dingy holes for worldly gain  
Let stooping dullards spend their prime;  
Let hermits prose in doleful moods,  
And book-worms in dry volumes delve,  
Give me the rivers, lakes, and woods,  
My freedom and the "Number Twelve."

## AS THE DAY BREAKS

I PRAY you, what's asleep?

The lily-pads, and ripples, and the reeds ;  
No longer inward do the waters creep  
No longer outwardly their force recedes,  
And widowed night, in blackness wide and deep,  
Resumes her weeds.

I pray you, what's awake?

A host of stars, the long, long milky way  
That stretches out, a glistening silver flake,  
All glorious beneath the moon's cold ray,  
And myriad reflections on the lake  
Where star-gleams lay.

I pray you, what's astir?

Why, naught but rustling leaves, dry, sere, and brown :  
The East's broad gates are yet a dusky blur  
And star-gems twinkle in fair Luna's crown,  
And minor chords of wailing winds that were  
Die slowly down.



I pray you, what's o'clock ?

Nay ! who shall answer that but gray-stoled dawn ?

See, how from out the shadows looms yon rock

Like some great figure on a canvas drawn ;

And heard you not the crowing of the cock ?

The night is gone.

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L



“ MARK ”

THE heavy mists have crept away,  
Heavily swims the sun,  
And dim in mystic cloudlands gray,  
The stars fade one by one ;  
Out of the dusk enveloping  
Come marsh and sky and tree,  
Where erst has rested night's dark ring  
Over the Kankakee.

“ Mark right ! ” Afar and faint outlined  
A flock of mallards fly,  
We crouch within the reedy blind  
Instantly at the cry.  
“ Mark left ! ” We peer through wild rice-blades  
And distant shadows see,  
A wedge-shaped phalanx from the shades  
Of far-off Kankakee.

“ Mark overhead ! ” A canvasback !  
“ Mark ! Mark ! ” A bunch of teal !

And swiftly on each flying track  
Follows the shot-gun's peal ;  
Thus rings that call, till twilight's tide  
Rolls in like some gray sea,  
And whippoorwills complain beside  
The lonely Kankakee.

## SPRING

SOMEWHAT of broken clouds edge-tipped with blue,  
Scattered and listless in the ashen sky,  
A sound of happy waters flowing by,  
And little blades of grass shy peeping through  
The old earth's crevices ; and starting new  
Are swelling buds upon the many boughs ;  
Long wakes of black behind advancing ploughs,  
And plough-shares misty with the morning dew.

Soon, soon, indeed, the couriers will bring  
Swift tidings of the joyous days to come,  
When Nature's heart, but yet so lately numb,  
Shall beat again, and birds will once more sing ;  
No more shall wintry arrows pierce and sting  
For far from where the chiding north-wind frets,  
Here in a nook are dainty violets,  
The meek and blue-eyed harbingers of spring.



MORNING IN THE HILLS

FAINT streaks of light in the far-down east  
    Outlined by an unseen pencil,  
The artist hand of the dawn's high priest  
    Who spreads o'er a shadowed stencil  
The silver hues of the morning's wings,  
    The dusk and the darkness flaking,  
While the old earth sighs, and the pine-top sings,  
    "Awake! for the day is breaking."

The gray squir'l barks, for the woods are still,  
    And the silence makes him braver,  
And he sees the sun behind the hill  
    Where the shadows twist and waver ;

The gray squir'l watches the dead leaves whirl,  
That the sun no more shall nourish,  
High on a branch with his tail a-curl  
Like a writing-master's flourish.

The partridge drums on an old dry log  
A haunt of worm and cricket,  
Down near the edge of a cranberry bog,  
Close by a white birch thicket ;  
And at times the reverberation floats  
Through the air so round and mellow,  
That it sounds as sweet as the basso notes  
Of a maestro's violoncello.

The gray squir'l barks, and the partridge drums,  
And the sunlight follows faster,  
And over the pines the wind-god comes  
With the touch of an untaught master,  
And he strikes the chords from a maze of limbs  
That glitter with frost-lace hoary,  
While eastward now as the darkness dims  
Is the sun in a sea of glory.





## "Over the Decoys"

LONE lies the tawny marsh, and lily pads,  
All crisped and wrinkled by the autumn sun,  
Swim lazily along the sighing reeds ;  
The strident reeds, that bar the passage-way,  
Where wanders past the lost and wailing breeze  
Over the gray, wan deserts of the dawn,  
Striking the frets of intertwining stems  
That rustle into weirdest music there.

And ruddily against the rising sun  
The ever-restless waters ripple up,  
Prying amid the rushes, and again,  
Upon the roots of dwarfish willow stubs,  
Lapping and lapping like a thirsty hound ;

And in an open space beyond the reeds,  
Riding like corks the little ruffled waves,  
Decoys are seen, those fateful wooden lures  
That draw the passing ducks from cloudy heights  
Down, down, and down, until the sportsman's aim  
Sends consternation to their scattered ranks.

And at the edges of the cat-tails tall,  
Among the rushes and the spatter-dock,  
A hunter waits, all watchful, in the " blind,"  
Whose rough, artistic tracing seems to be,  
With all its tangled drapery of reeds,  
Wild rice, and grass, and leaning willow-branch,  
Like elfin work of nature and the winds.

Mark ! far adown the distant line of trees  
A narrow dusky ribbon is revealed,  
That nearer comes, and as it comes unfolds,  
And shows in all their symmetry of form  
A flock of ducks outlined upon the sky,  
Curving and wheeling in the morning light.

And as they near the hunter's ambuscade  
They turn, they stoop, while he with muscles set,  
And tense as steel, and eager-shining eyes  
Sits like a stone, his gun within his hands ;  
The winds are hushed. Ah ! what a picture that—  
The blue-bills settling to the still decoys.

## TWILIGHT

Down in the edge of a tamarack swamp  
A rabbit lay in his burrow,  
And he heard the elves of Boreas romp  
Through the woods and field and furrow ;  
And out in the dusk the glow-worm lit  
His lamp in the misty gloaming,  
And the night-hawks over the trees would flit  
And out through the night go roaming.

A cricket chirped on a sassafras limb,  
A tree-toad piped on a willow,  
And the full moon's circle lay all dim  
Reclined on a cloudy pillow ;  
A whippoorwill in the distance cried,  
And a few lone star-gleams twinkled,  
While drifting over the meadow wide  
The cow-bells clanged and tinkled.

Like the changing folds of an ancient loom  
That the eye and mind perplexes,

A bat criss-crossed in the deepening gloom  
And marked aërial X's ;  
While up from the edge of a shallow bog,  
With its moss-banks soft and porous,  
Came the sound of minstrels all agog—  
The bull-frogs' opening chorus.

The mist grew clear, and the clouds grew bright,  
And the silence crisp and crisper,  
And the trailing folds of the robe of night  
Came soft as a ghostly whisper ;  
And out in the skies the full moon sailed  
With the stars to all attend her,  
And the pearl-gray tints of the twilight failed  
In night's Cimmerian splendor.

## A SWALLOW

I SING you a song of a swallow

With a purple breast and buoyant wings,

Curving down where the south wind springs

From out of a grassy hollow.

From out of a sylvan hollow—

And the swift wings swerve where water sleeps,

And up from the depths a ripple leaps

At the dip of a darting swallow.

At the touch of a mad-cap swallow—

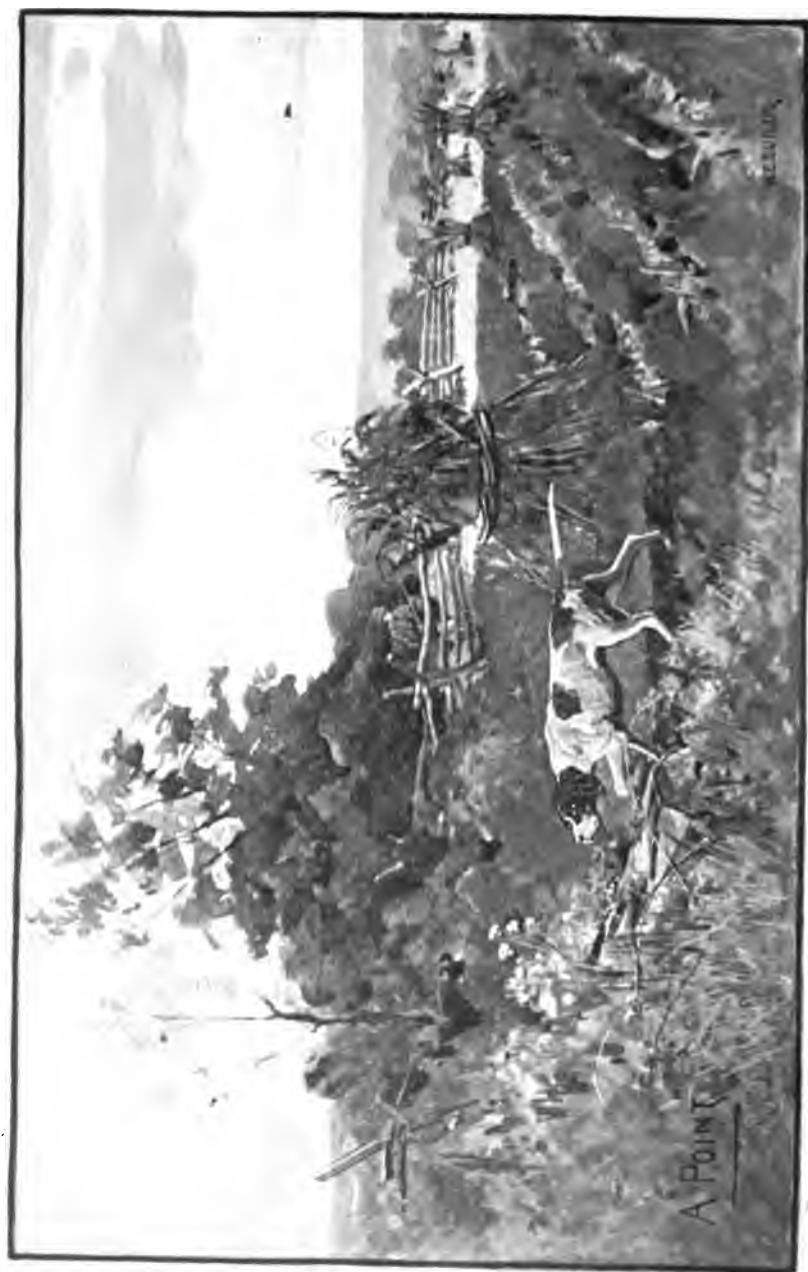
And his rhythmic sweep of motion brings

The sudden sense of a soul on wings,

That leads where I long to follow.

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## A "POINT"

By rude November's hands the woods are shorn,  
And dead leaves whirl in gusty eddies round ;  
And by an old rail fence a field of corn  
Sways, snaps, and rustles with a creaking sound  
As dry husks break and flutter to the ground ;  
While sigh the winds in melody forlorn,  
And crisp, thick grass, by russet autumn browned,  
Waves in the cool tide floating o'er the morn.

Deep in a thorny patch that skirts the fence  
Are huddled close a bevy of shy quail,  
Where the wide thicket reaches brown and dense,  
Along a slope that crowns the narrow swale ;  
All cosily they nestle 'neath a veil  
Of briars and of thistle-stalks, from whence  
Wee ships of gossamer spread snowy sail,  
And cobwebs stretch in fairy tether tense.

Lo ! a light footstep, and a dog draws nigh,  
Then pauses, rigid, as if carved of stone,



And quick excitement lights his eager eye,  
As straight ahead his piercing glance is thrown ;  
The well-known scent across his pathway blown  
Fills his keen nostrils as it passes by,  
And tells him that among the briars prone,  
And out of sight, the bright-eyed bevy lie.

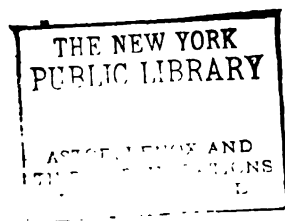
## IN AUTUMN WOODS

CRISP-RUSTLING leaves in scattered lines  
Under the bare, deserted trees ;  
Dead branches stripped of every leaf,  
And sombre winds that tell their grief  
Through shadowy vistas such as these,  
Hung here and there with russet vines ;  
Gone all the colors June once bore  
And all that Indian-summer wore,  
While in the creek's smooth pools below  
The waters dark and darker glow,  
In Autumn Woods.

Sweet, silent hushes in these aisles,  
Filled with the breath of lasting calm ;  
Æolian echoes, vaguely strange,  
That whisper of eventful change,  
While cleaving through the misty balm  
A wandering sunbeam softly smiles ;  
Here lurks amid the arches rude



The gray old ghost of solitude,  
And here along the lonely path  
Fades out the summer's aftermath,  
In Autumn Woods.



ALMA RIVER



W. E. B. DUBOIS

## A PRAIRIE ROVER

ALONG a line of timber lies the lake,  
A liquid floor,  
And wailing croons November's eerie voice  
Beside the shore ;  
The lily-pads, like sleeping faces, lie  
Upon a bed  
Of dimpled waters, shadow-crossed and lone,  
And overhead,  
All meteor-like across the russet sky,  
A bunch of teal come sailing swiftly by.

And in their airy wake, and gaining fast  
With lightning speed, a dark bird whizzes past.

One whirling curve pursuers and pursued  
Together make,  
Then downward stoops the scattered line of ducks  
Toward the lake ;  
But as they near the refuge waiting there,  
The duck-hawk springs,

Cutting the trembling air at one quick swoop  
With rustling wings,  
And o'er the prairie, floating soft and white,  
Are feather-signs that mark the duck-hawk's flight.

## SUMACH

COARSE-GRAINED and harsh the slender stalks  
Of wayside sumach stand,  
And each lithe branch uplifted seems  
As some cup-bearer, tanned,  
Who holds to Autumn's lips divine  
A goblet of sun-tinted wine  
With mute, adoring hand.

And deeply to the very lees  
The russet goddess drains  
These jewelled cups that erst were filled  
From Summer's glowing veins—  
Red draughts that hold the subtle sense  
Of pungent sylvan frankincense  
And misty later rains.

Then, like some alchemy of old,  
The magic ichor flies  
From pulse to heart, and rising lends  
New glory to her eyes,



Where shadowy fire an instant leaps  
As lightning from a cloud that sleeps  
Fast moored in stormy skies.

And blithely as she passes on  
Sound Autumn's chariot-wheels,  
As gliding through her being swift,  
The sumach's life she feels ;  
While over all the landscape brown  
A flood of sunlight rushes down  
And baffled winter kneels.

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### “HARD HIT”

GRIM on a topmost branch he stood,  
All statue-like, against the sky,  
The breath of Autumn filled the wood  
And slumbrous clouds swam far on high.

Then, whip-like, came a rifle-shot—  
How sinister its challenge sang !  
And with his death-wound fairly got  
Into the air the old hawk sprang.

One stroke his wings made ere he swerved  
High o'er the shadow-haunted dell,  
One blow with talons outward curved,  
Then, sudden as he leaped, he fell.

## AUTUMN

A CORN-FIELD stretching to the woods below,  
Where corn-husks crack and, breaking up, unfold  
The grains of corn in many a tempting row,  
With Nature's stamp upon the virgin gold ;  
Great yellow pumpkins on the fertile mould,  
And vines slow-spreading through the spaces dim,  
While over all a whispered vesper hymn  
Drifts from the edges of the forest old.

And there, arrayed in burnished armor brown,  
Tall, solemn oaks, like giant warriors rise,  
And through the hazy vistas dropping down,  
Come buoyant leaves, in red and russet dyes,  
Above the trees a lone crow slowly flies  
Winging his flight toward the dying sun,  
While Autumn, like a sweet-faced, holy nun,  
Shades with a trembling hand her sad brown eyes.

## RED AND BROWN

THE sumach's flaming colors rise beside the old stone  
wall

And hazel-bushes, sunshine-browned, are whispering  
in the breeze,

While through the woods on every side is heard the  
crackling fall

Of ripened nuts slow falling from the swaying hickory-  
trees.

Upon a gnarled and new-cut stump beneath the sturdy  
oaks

A spider, running back and forth, a fairy circle  
weaves—

A silver wheel, whose glistening hub and filmy maze of  
spokes

Is stretched across the splinters in the shadow of the  
leaves.

The velvet moss on ancient logs is fading into gray ;

A fox-squirrel runs across the leaves, that rustle as he  
leaps,

And through the trees the sunlight falls and slowly melts  
away,

Where round a bend in darkling curves the pulsing  
water sweeps.

Low, sweet and low, and liquidly, the creek's faint  
echoes call,

While on its amber current float the oak-leaves crisp  
and brown,

And all day long, as winds dance past across the tree-tops  
tall,

From branches bare the hickory-nuts come rattling  
slowly down.

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The  
Twelve-tined  
Buck.

H. E. BUTLER

## THE TWELVE-TINED BUCK

THE mist rose out of the valley,  
The mist climbed up from the lake,  
And a musk-rat's course in the water  
Spread out in a glimmering wake.

The red sun's edge came peeping  
O'er the top of a far-off hill,  
The winds lay furled in the floating clouds  
And the leaves and the grass were still.

But over the pines and cedars  
Re-echoed a distant horn,  
And a hound's faint bay chimed with it  
In the hush of the waking morn.

And then from a balsam thicket  
Came the sound of a sudden crash,  
And a twelve-tined buck sprang out and stood  
By the side of a quaking ash.

His horns were brown as the Autumn,  
And his hoofs like jasper shone,  
And his dark eyes gleamed in the dawning  
As he snuffed the breeze alone.

And then as the gathering echoes  
Brought up the hounds' deep cry,  
He passed like a steel-gray shadow  
And scattered the pine-cones dry.

And down through the tall pine timber,  
As an arrow will cut its way,  
He fled to the quickening clamor  
Of the hounds with their mellow bay.

The partridge flew from the pine-top  
As the twelve-tined buck went by,  
And the chipmunk dived in a knot-hole smooth  
And closed his glittering eye.

And a black-snake slid from his coiling  
And deeper in shadows crept,  
And a great white owl, disturbed on high,  
Called once, and then he slept.

But out from the shade and shadow,  
And down through the woods apace,

Came the deer with the dogs pursuing,  
And out through an open space.

And there for a fateful instant  
The crack of a rifle came,  
A puff of smoke in the russet air,  
Death-tipped with a dart of flame.

But over the buck's broad antlers  
The wandering bullet flew,  
And into the tangled copses  
He plunged and battled through.

While still on the trail came floating,  
As he fled with his mighty bounds,  
The deep, relentless baying  
Of the first of the foremost hounds.

So he turned to the sleeping water  
Edged round with spongy moss,  
And leaped in the dimpling ripples  
And bravely swam across,

Where a long, low island stretching,  
In the midst of the lonely lake,  
Held bog and fern, and a haven  
Of shadowy, wildest brake.

And into its far recesses

He dropped like a wind-tossed waif,

And a deer-hound whined on the shore he left,

But the twelve-tined buck was safe.



## PAN

By the wandering river  
Forever,  
Where restless waters ran,  
Would the reeds croon low  
When the winds did blow,  
Under the touch of Pan,  
Great Pan,  
Who played where the ripples ran.

At the edge of the river,  
Oh ! never  
As yet surpassed by man,  
From the reed-bed floats  
Those musical notes  
Fresh from the lips of Pan,  
God Pan,  
So far from the haunts of man.

None by the dreaming river  
Shall ever

His face or figure scan,  
Yet they all may hear  
A melody clear,  
The rhythmic runes of Pan,  
Gray Pan,  
In the wilds remote from man.



### ÆOLIAN ECHOES

NAV, then, for trifles rude as these

Shall Orpheus sweep the vibrant strings :

“ A squirrel's brush, a sumach bough,”

“ A partridge and a jay-bird's wings.”

I see the dull December woods

Most darkly wrapped in sombre hue,

And lightly through their leafless tops

The jay-bird flits—a patch of blue.

And where among the branches bare

The waves of morning rise and fall,

All querulous and shrill resounds

The wandering jay-bird's woodland call.



A hickory-tree among the oaks  
An instant in the stillness swings,  
As from the slender topmost limbs  
A hurrying squirrel outward springs.

And down a gnarled and ancient oak  
With agile leaps the space he clears,  
Near to a hole his gay brush flaunts  
One moment, then he disappears.

A waste of leaves all crisp and brown,  
And briars where the cobweb clings ;  
Old logs, a brush-pile here and there,  
And all at once a whirr of wings.

As from a hazel-thicket dense  
Near to a rolling wooded rise,  
With rustling noise of pinions broad,  
Swift through the trees a partridge flies.

A scarlet tinge that dyes the west,  
Cloud-ships beneath with ruddy prows,  
And redder still, yet darkly red,  
I see the glowing sumach boughs.

Their clustered shapes like goblets seem,  
All brimming over, one by one,

With ruby drops that catch the fire  
Which, westward, marks the dying sun.

Thus fancy draws with misty lines  
These etchings that I copy now :  
“ A partridge and a jay-bird’s wings,”  
“ A squirrel’s brush and sumach bough.”



## SUNRISE

FIRST, one by one, the stars stole soft away,  
And dark and darker grew the western rim ;  
The hornéd moon's bright lustre 'gan to dim,  
And then long ripples came of ashen gray  
That tipped the dusky billows of the night  
With myriad trembling flakes of faintest light.

Next, shapeless things new forms began to take,  
A milk-white lance flashed thro' the eastern skies,  
And Dawn unwilling came with drowsy eyes,  
All dreamily, as only half-awake ;  
Then slowly rose the sun, a fiery shield,  
And one lone bird-note sounded far afield.

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## A "DOUBLE "

Low to the east the shadows all are tinged  
    With faint, far crimson lines that rise and fall,  
Then slowly spread to where the lake is fringed  
    With willows, reeds, and rushes brown and tall ;  
And eastward where the river winds along,  
    High up a pair of mallards wing their flight  
With outstretched necks and pinions fleet and strong,  
    When to the right  
Out leaps a double flash of flame through the pale, marshy  
    light.

Two quick reports that blend almost in one,  
    Two jets of fire that pierce the morning gray,  
And the deep echoes, booming, roll along  
    The solitary lake and die away.

Like a lead-plummet falls the foremost bird  
    Into the waters of the reedy lake,  
And as the second sharp report is heard  
    The stricken mate, a noble mallard drake,

Strikes his strong wings together as he drops,  
    Spins round and round and droops his bright green  
        head,  
Then whirls down to the water, where he stops  
    And floats stone-dead,  
While round him scattered feathers lie upon a rippling  
    bed.

## SUNSET

A CHILL wind blew from the far northwest,  
And down through the gates of day it came ;  
The sun sank low in a fading glow  
And shadows fell on the cold earth's breast ;  
The dead leaves stirred, and a last year's nest  
Shook, as the winds went wandering by  
Through the sunset's flame.

The reeds stood black at the water's edge,  
Where the moon's faint crescent lay so still,  
And twilight shades from the upland glades  
Drifted down over field and hedge ;  
The wind sang sharp in the withered sedge,  
And a last red gleam flared up and out  
From a distant hill.





### THE GRAY GOOSE QUILL

I TAKE my gray goose quill in act to write,  
But gone are all my thoughts, for echoes near  
A clarion-uttered signal strong and clear—  
The clanging of the wild geese in their flight,  
As down across the wide and star-strewn night  
They hold their wedge-shaped course throughout the sere  
And boundless void of that bleak atmosphere,  
Where swims the moon in garish, ghostly light  
And cloudy haze. Again upon the marsh,  
Within the rough-built blind, alert I stand,  
And eastward look for the first dawning ray ;  
And now, as memory holds subtle sway,  
I hear a distant honking, crisp and harsh,  
And crush my wingèd pen in clenched right hand.

## COBWEBS

A SPIDER spun a gossamer web  
With threads of the finest tether,  
And as light as the buoyant thistle-down  
It swayed in the wind and weather.

And over the threads the breezes swept  
As sweet as a fairy vesper,  
And over the leaves and the grass below  
Came a faint Æolian whisper :

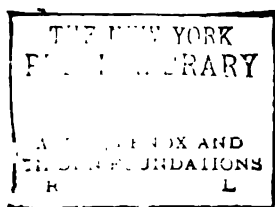
“ Oh, I was woven of silken strands  
In a web and woof together,  
And I swing from a thistle's prickly top  
On the brown and wind-swept heather.

“ I'm lulled to sleep by the cricket's chirp,  
I wake at the skylark's warning ;  
I am wooed by the twilight's loving eyes  
And the tender kiss of morning.

“ I hear the chant of the bending trees  
From a distant thicket's cover,  
And faint and far from the sky above  
The cry of the golden plover.

“ To-day goes by and to-morrow comes,  
And it leaves me as it found me ;  
I am safe from all destroying hands,  
With the arms of nature round me.

“ I care as little for time or tide  
As the fickle wind that passes,  
My world is here with the sun and dew,  
Along with the leaves and grasses.”





## THE LAST BUFFALO

CHEYENNE and Arapahoe, Pawnee and Sioux,  
Comanche and Kiowa, Blackfoot and Crow—  
Their tepees were scattered wherever grass grew,  
Their pony-tracks showed by each river's smooth flow,  
And Nature was given them—God the great giver—  
Stream, forest, and prairie with long, rolling mounds,  
And there they went forth with the bow, spear, and  
quiver,  
And led the rude chase on those vast hunting grounds.

From dusk Mississippi to where stood the base  
Of the frowning Sierras o'ertopping the clouds,  
Upon whose lone steeps the wild sheep found a place  
Where mist wreathed the summits in dim, floating  
shrouds ;  
Here lay their domain, no environment bound them,  
Barbaric and cunning, and free as the birds,  
And there on the prairies, beyond and around them,  
The buffaloes wandered in numberless herds.

Strange cattle who fed on a thousand green hills,  
Cow, calf, and huge bulls with their thick, streaming  
manes,  
They cropped the rich grass and drank deep of the rills  
In the tortuous streams intersecting the plains ;  
And rumblingly there, from the hollow ground under,  
When the mighty mass moved, a low echo began  
That wavered and gathered and swelled into thunder,  
While trembled the earth where the buffaloes ran.

And there on their trail the coyote was seen,  
And the greater gray wolf with his glittering teeth,  
That flashed from their ambush—jaws narrow and lean—  
As the blade of a bowie-knife gleams from a sheath,  
And low in the grass the coiled rattlesnake lying,  
His challenge shrilled out as they swiftly went by,  
While mute on the edges grim ravens were flying,  
And buzzards hung over them poised in the sky.

And from their quaint villages prairie-dogs gazed,  
As the endless processions went galloping past,  
And over the prairie their pathway was blazed  
As the beaten-down woods mark the hurricane's blast ;  
For near and afar the wild flowers and grasses,  
Harsh iron-weed tall and the red roses sweet,

Were tangled and trampled in colorless masses,  
And ground into dust by the buffaloes' feet.

Thus roved the swart bison in days long ago,  
And there the red Indian dwelt by his side,  
And there, by the warrior's lance and the bow,  
In hundreds and thousands the buffaloes died ;  
And still through the march of the seasons unceasing  
They drifted and mingled and multiplied more,  
In dense-thronging bands on the prairies increasing,  
Like the green-bladed grass or the sands by the shore.

But down on their ranks swept the white man at last,  
With his rifle in hand, riding westward for gold,  
While hordes of hide-hunters came following fast,  
More fierce than the wolves that had trailed them of  
old,  
And the wide Western steppe was an altar of slaughter,  
And the stain of those days with dark mammon abides,  
When the rivers ran blood and when blood ran like water,  
For a million of buffaloes slain for their hides.

And there in the sunshine the ravens flew down  
And perched and sat silent on ominous bones,  
Grave kings of destruction, sans sceptre and crown,  
Who mockingly ruled from their ossified thrones ;



For out through the distance, far spreading and reaching,  
As white as the wings of the seafaring gulls,  
The horns and the heads of the bison lay bleaching  
And made of the land a Golgotha of skulls.

The tepees have vanished, the savage moves on ;  
From the graves of his chiefs to the slow sinking sun,  
The realm that he owned to the stranger has gone,  
And the day of his race, like a story, is done ;  
And safe from the clutches of sordid-souled schemer,  
Far hid in some nook of the mountainous lands,  
Black-browed and defiant, and sad as a dreamer,  
Alone in his might the last buffalo stands.

## WINTER

FENCES half buried in the drifting snow,  
And trees beside them, ghostly-limbed and drear,  
Where wailing breezes wander to and fro  
Across the gray and icy atmosphere ;  
No sound to comfort and no hope to cheer  
Where skies so blank monotonously stare,  
While Ceres waits, all dreamy with despair,  
And mourns the saddest season of the year.

Leaf, bud, and blossom—flowers—ay, and song  
Of warbling birds, all gladsome things like these  
In other lands and other climes belong ;  
Sun-flooded sands that wait by summer seas,  
Green-bladed grass, and leaves upon the trees—  
Yet all this will be here, but in a breath ;  
For this is sleep—that foolish ones call death—  
Till Nature rises from her bended knees.

## HUNTERS

A CRICKET fed on an insect  
Too small for eye to see,  
A field-mouse captured the cricket  
And hushed his minstrelsy.

A gray shrike pounced on the field-mouse  
And hung him on a thorn,  
And a hawk came down on the cruel shrike  
From over the waving corn.

And a fox sprang out on the red-tailed hawk  
From under a fallen tree,  
For bird and beast, by flood and field,  
Of every degree,

Prey one upon the other ;  
'Twas thus ordained to be.  
My rifle laid old Reynard low,  
And death—death looked at me.

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# The Rod

W. H. BENTLEY

## THE ROD ▪

A ROD for bass and wall-eyed pike  
When over sandy shoals they throng,  
Adapted both to "cast" or "strike,"  
Of split bamboo and lithe and long,  
With pliant tip that wavers like  
Some shivering aspen slim and strong.

And at the butt the clicking reel  
With braided silken line is wound,  
A miniature of fortune's wheel  
When a good fish the lure has found,  
And in your nervous grip you feel  
Its shining circle whirl around.

A good plain rod by all that's fair,  
And whips the water like a thong,  
In Northern lakes all lonely where  
The muskalunge and bass belong;  
Supple and straight beyond compare,  
And worthy of a better song.

## A "RISE"

UNDER the shadows of a cliff  
Crowned with a growth of stately pine  
An angler moors his rocking skiff  
And o'er the ripple casts his line,  
And where the darkling current crawls  
Like thistle-down the gay lure falls.

•Then from the depths a silver gleam  
Quick flashes, like a jewel bright,  
Up through the waters of the stream  
An instant visible to sight—  
As lightning cleaves the sombre sky  
The black bass rises to the fly.

## OUT-DOORS

A WOOD-CHUCK sat on an orchard knoll,  
Brown and still in the soft spring morning,  
A martin sprang from a sand-bank hole  
And a rain-crow uttered his note of warning ;  
While down by the creek the rushes swayed  
And a nameless pungent music made,  
That came and went at its own rude pleasure,  
The faint-heard notes of a marshy measure.

A robin piped with a note as sweet  
As a flute-note played in a mellow minor,  
And the leaf-harps, swept by the breezes fleet,  
In whispering tones came fine and finer,  
While close by the side of a bulrush bed  
A snapping-turtle raised his head,  
And a swallow dipped to the creek in passing,  
His shadow there for an instant glassing.

A pickerel lay by an old log bridge,  
Where the moss grew low on the midmost panel,



He cocked his eye at a passing midge  
And waved his fins as he watched the channel,  
While a gathering murmur slowly welled  
And into a sibilant chorus swelled,  
And a tall blue crane in silence listened  
Where the long creek-shallows glanced and glistened.

A bobolink rose in the sun-thrilled air,  
A spirit of song, with the blue sky o'er him,  
And his trembling wings from the meadow there,  
As he sang and sang, still upward bore him,  
While high where a banner of cloud-film trailed  
A hawk, a speck in the zenith, sailed,  
And dew on the coarse swamp-grass was clinging,  
With Pan's wild chords in the distance ringing.

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## SPEARING

WHERE a long, narrow channel stretched,  
Mid lily-pads and bulrush beds,  
And water-spiders slid across,  
Like acrobats, on tense-drawn threads,  
A pickerel, like a floating log,  
Lay motionless within the bog.

And slowly up the channel's tide  
A skiff came creeping, foot by foot,  
While light as dips a swallow down  
The oarsman in the ripples put  
His short, broad blade, and bubbles dripped  
And smoothly from its edges slipped.

And virile in his vigorous pose  
The spearsman in the vanguard stood,  
And poised within his raised right hand  
The heavy shaft of pitch-pine wood,  
Whose iron trident glittered bare  
And coldly in the warm June air.

Smooth, soft and smooth, and noiselessly,  
The skiff approached the bulrush bed,  
And suddenly across the stream  
The frightened fish like lightning sped ;  
But ere he reached the reeds he sought,  
In that one instant, danger-fraught,

The spearsman's arm had straightened out,  
The heavy shaft like javelin flew,  
It clashed against the ripples there  
And lent the wave a ruddier hue,  
And on the barb's dull iron gray,  
Transfixed, the struggling pickerel lay.

## MARSH ECHOES

WHEN twilight on the rushes falls  
And threads the moon through night's dark halls,  
When dims the far horizon line  
And glow-worms phosphorescent shine,  
Then comes in deepest basso full,  
Like bellowing of a roving bull,

“ Ah-rr-oomp ! Ah-rr-oomp !  
Ba-aa-rroomp ! ”

O'erhead the ghostly night-hawk flits,  
And in the woods in silence sits  
The whippoorwill, while round the lake  
Soft on the shores the ripples break,  
And sound there is none save that call,  
Reverberating over all,

“ Ah-rr-oomp ! Ah-rr-oomp !  
Ba-aa-rroomp ! ”

The tinkling cow-bells in the hush  
No more are heard, and in the lush

And coarse swamp-grass the bull-frogs lie,  
While echoes far their guttural cry ;  
Across the lily-pads and cane  
A solemn and a hoarse refrain,

“ Ah-rr-oomp ! Ah-rr-oomp !  
Ba-aa-rroomp ! ”

And Pan, among the sighing reeds,  
When night has told her starry beads  
One after one, stands silent there,  
While float upon the darkening air  
Those unmelodious, mournful notes  
Sent upward from Batracean throats,

“ Ah-rr-oomp ! Ah-rr-oomp !  
Ba-aa-rroomp ! ”

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## FISHING

WITH hickory switch and linen twine  
He sits upon the country bridge ;  
Below him, where the sun's rays shine,  
Across the water glides a midge ;  
The cat-tails to the ripples tip  
And craw-fish mould their cells of clay,  
And wandering swallows downward dip  
An instant there and then away.

Beside him is the homely can  
That holds the bait, and by his side  
His yellow dog, a rataplan,  
Beats on the oaken timbers wide ;  
Slow swims the cork and then it drifts,  
And bobs and sinks and wavers there,  
While bends the switch as quick he lifts  
A wriggling sun-fish through the air.

The meadows ring with melody  
From rapturous fluttering bobolinks,

And on a blackened fallen tree  
Is stretched, as solemn as the sphinx,  
An old mud-turtle's awkward form,  
And dragon-flies above him skim,  
Out, where the sunlight dances warm,  
And in where shadows hover dim.

I grant you all you else may claim  
When manhood seeks its fullest due,  
I grant you honor, place, and fame,  
I grant that she you loved was true ;  
I grant you gray in years, and rich,  
So that you but could give me then  
The brook, the fish, the hickory switch,  
And time to be a boy again.

## THE BROOK TROUT

How swift and strong its waters glide—  
The brook—a clear, resistless tide,  
And slowly down the mountain side  
    The angler goes.

The soft air drifts through solemn pines  
And dreamily the sunlight shines,  
As past the alders, rocks, and vines  
    The current flows,

Above the depths that now conceal  
What tempting lures may yet reveal,  
An instant whirls the nimble reel,  
    Then drops the fly,  
And by the glancing ripples caught,  
A moment there the line is taut,  
And then, as suddenly as thought,  
    Goes whirling by.

And where the swift brook turning trends,  
Just as the broadening ripple ends,

There comes a tug, a thrill that sends  
    Along the rod,  
A message from the slender tip  
From whence the liquid diamonds drip,  
That violently makes it dip  
    And downward nod.

And then it bends from tip to butt,  
While through the pool the ripples cut,  
And close and closer yet is shut,  
    Then upward flies,  
As drawn from out his pebbly hold,  
Brightly against the forest mould,  
Vermilion, silver, black, and gold,  
    The brook trout lies.

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## “BROKE AWAY”

Out flew the line ; the burnished reel  
    Gleamed brightly in the waning sun,  
The waves lapped lightly 'gainst our keel,  
    The day was wellnigh done ;  
Faint outlined on the southern sky,  
    A yellow sickle lay the moon,  
And eerily arose the cry,  
    Far shoreward, of a loon.

Then bent the rod ; the slender tip,  
    With one quick curve the silence cut,  
Sharp as the motion of a whip,  
    Until it neared the butt ;  
Full well was strained the silken braid  
    By swift retreat and sudden tack,  
At last one furious lunge was made  
    And then the line lay slack.

Then all at once the slackened line  
    Stretched outward through the waters deep,



We saw a flash of silver shine,

We saw a black bass leap ;

By Hercules ! a gallant fish—

One spring, and like dissolving spray,

The line and, leader parted—"swish"—

Click—"broke away."

## DIANA

BARELEGGED to her shapely knee,  
She waded in the mountain brook ;  
To her an infant's A B C  
Was every leaf in Nature's book ;  
And in her brown and lithe left hand  
An Indian bow she lightly held,  
While up from 'neath her tangled hair  
Her eyes like clear spring water welled.

Over her shoulder round was flung  
A quiver of long arrows keen,  
And there she trod the rocks among,  
A wild and graceful forest queen ;  
And often on the ripples came,  
A sight she marked with eager eyes,  
Sharp rushes, marked by bubble-rings,  
Where the trout rose to snap at flies.

And whiles she set a feathered shaft  
Close to her cheek and drew the bow—

Well skilled was she in forest-craft—

And smiled to see her arrow go,

As flashed its point against the stream

Like lightning, where the ripples shook,

Transfixing in his downward rush

The finned chameleon of the brook.

## MINNOWS

THE minnows through the water slid,  
Pellucid shadows, vague as dreams ;  
And darting o'er the pebbles hid  
Safe in the shore-line's yawning seams.

An instant there, as morning beams  
Flashed from Old Sol's half-opened lid,  
The minnows through the water slid,  
Pellucid shadows, vague as dreams.

Round a huge boulder of the streams,  
A gray, half-sunken pyramid,  
Like sudden flight of pallid gleams  
The brook's transparent depths amid,  
The minnows through the water slid,  
Pellucid shadows, vague as dreams.

## THE DESERTED BOAT

DEEP in the soft black ooze it lies  
Slow rotting under summer skies,  
And over it the blackbird flies.

The sand-snipe skim across the space  
Where the old boat finds resting place  
Close folded in the weeds' embrace.

Sun, sun and shadow, wind and rain  
Come following in the season's train  
And mark its form with many a stain.

Along its lines the ripple sleeps,  
Upon its bow the turtle creeps,  
And by its side the pickerel leaps.

And one lone lily, white and gold,  
That seems a touch of hope to hold,  
Gleams bright against its blackening mould.

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The Red-wing

WINTER

## THE REDWING

On a bulrush stalk a blackbird swung  
All in the sun and the sunshine weather,  
Teetered and scolded there as he hung  
O'er the maze of the swamp-woof's tangled tether ;  
And the spots on his wings were red as fire,  
And his notes rang sweet as Apollo's lyre.

The summer woods were a haze of blue,  
Draped and robed with an emerald kirtle,  
And the blackbird whistled clear and true  
Till the thrush was mute in the flowered myrtle ;  
And the spots on his wings were red as fire,  
And his notes rang sweet as Apollo's lyre.

A black bass leaped for a dragon-fly  
And struck the spray from the sleeping water,  
While airily, eerily, there on high  
Sang the blackbird pert from his " teeter-totter ; "  
And the spots on his wings were red as fire,  
And his notes rang sweet as Apollo's lyre.



A fig for the music born of man,  
I shake my head and I doubt me whether  
Your cultured strain has a charm for Pan  
When a blackbird sings in the sunshine weather,  
With the spots on his wings as red as fire,  
And his notes as sweet as Apollo's lyre.

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# "A Strike"



## A "STRIKE"

A RIVER winding through the marsh  
Where rushes waver crisp and harsh,  
And slowly by the farther shore,  
With softest sweep of dripping oar,  
A boat goes past along the edge,  
By lily-pads and matted sedge.

And in the stern a figure stands  
With fishing-rod in outstretched hands,  
And where the line is outward cast,  
Near to the rushes drifting past,  
All brightly 'neath the morning beams  
The trailing spoon-hook swerves and gleams.

Then suddenly the lithe rod bends,  
And swift the tense, taut line extends,  
As all at once from watery lair  
A watchful pickerel lurking there  
Drops like a panther on the prey,  
Strikes, feels the hook, and darts away.



## THE DEATH OF THE MUSKALUNGE

PINE-SHELTERED shores that stretch 'neath northern skies,  
And under them a dreaming forest lies ;  
Dim shadow-trees, whose moveless branches stand  
Like castle-turrets in a sunken land.

And gliding o'er the lake's smooth-mirrored blue,  
All noiseless, comes a long birch-bark canoe,  
And in its bow a sun-bronzed fisher kneels,  
While from his rod, with outward motion, wheels

Swift in the air the glimmer of a "spoon,"  
Curving a crescent like the pale new moon ;  
It strikes the surface with a liquid sound  
And through the water, shining, whirls around.

Then all at once a mighty fish upsprings,  
The rod bends double and the bright reel sings,  
As from the depths a giant muskalunge  
Vaults and evanishes with sullen plunge.

And once again from out the emerald deeps,  
Shaking his jaws, the great fish upward leaps ;  
Then 'mid the ripples furiously he goes,  
While after him the light canoe he tows.

Another bound, and like a sounding flail  
He slaps the water with his lusty tail,  
And as he stretches at the silken reins  
The tough rod quivers and the tackle strains.

An hour's passed since first he took the "spoon,"  
And wanes the day to deepest afternoon ;  
Long, dusky curves bask silent on the sands,  
Darker below the buried forest stands.

Up from the shades he struggles once again,  
A desperate rush—a feebler one—and then,  
Conquered at last, he rises from the shoals  
And, half inert, upon the water rolls—

Yields to the gaff, and soon the noble prize  
Before the victor unresisting lies ;

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The contest over and his strong race run,  
A battle royal by the sportsman won.

Westward the sun with flaming distaff twines  
A blood-red garland round the tufted pines,  
And day, slow sinking in the ruddy light,  
Sees gray stars blossom by the paths of night.



## VALE

He was an old-time friend of mine—and one to trust ;  
We followed the streams as comrades, with rod and  
gun,  
And together we roamed the hills in rain or sun ;  
But now he is gone, and all that is left is a handful of  
dust.

The out-door man, after all, is the one with heart,  
For it cramps the body and soul to live in-doors ;  
In out-door-land the spirit high as an eagle soars,  
And his was an eagle spirit, though now it soars apart.

Music he heard in the winds and the running streams,  
In the rifle's sharp report and the thunder's peal ;  
In the thrush's song, in the click of a winding reel ;  
But now he is silent in death, that last great dream of  
dreams.

Friend and comrade of mine by wood and marshy shore,  
Thine absent self on me a subtle power wields ;



Thou art with me still by the rivers, lakes, and fields,  
Though the lakes and rivers and fields henceforth know  
thee no more.

Thou art above me now—beyond the azure dome,  
Of the far blue heavens whose void will ever be  
Between our paths as a soundless, shoreless sea,  
Till a cry from the dusk shall stay my steps and call me  
home.





























